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CAPITOL STUFF

By STAN CARTER

Washington, July 15—Walt Whitman Rostow, whose job is to make sure that what President Johnson wants to happen in foreign policy does happen, leaned back on the couch in his White House office.

He was in shirt sleeves, and his feet were propped on a coffee table. He clasped his hands behind his neck.

Officials here concede that there has been no indication yet that the bombing of North Viet Nam's fuel dumps had forced a change of heart in Hanoi. The Viet Nam war could go on for another five years. Still, Rostow sounded optimistic.

Getting

That Inner

Confidence

"What you're getting now," he said, "is a kind of inner confidence that we can see it through, no cheap optimism but an inner confidence."

The war strategy that Johnson is following now is one that Rostow urged on President Kennedy nearly five years ago.

"Rostow argued so forcefully for a contingency plan of retaliation against the north, graduated to match the intensity of Hanoi's support of the Viet Cong, that 'Rostow Plan 6' became jocularly established in the contingency planning somewhere after Seato Plan 5," Arthur Schlesinger Jr. related in his book about the Kennedy Administration.

Rostow was the first of many officials to urge bombing the north. Johnson pondered the question for many months. When he ordered the limited bombing of military targets 16 months ago it was his own decision. The President still had doubts, but he thought the arguments for bombing outweighed those against.

Similarly, after long pondering, Johnson ordered the bombing of the north's oil supplies last month. That, too, was a course that Rostow had advocated.

When McGeorge Bundy left the White House staff last February to head the Ford Foundation, it was widely predicted that the "Little State Department" he presided over in the basement of the west wing would be dissolved. It hasn't worked out quite that way.

Rostow, who moved into Bundy's old office, didn't get Bundy's explicit title of special assistant for national security affairs. And Johnson frequently bypasses him, dealing directly with top officials at the State and Defense Departments and the Central Intelligence Agency.

"The President talks to many people, then makes his own decisions," said another White House official.

The officials outside the White House whom the President consults include Secretary of State Rusk, Undersecretary George Ball and (on Viet Nam questions) Assistant Secretary William Bundy; Defense Secretary McNamara, Deputy Secretary Cyrus Vance and Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, John McNaughton; Gen. Earle Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and CIA Director Richard Helms.



Walt Rostow
"No cheap optimism"

Economic Historian Turned Social Philosopher

But, despite the contrary predictions, Special Presidential Assistant Rostow has become the No. 1 adviser on foreign policy inside the White House. Press Secretary Bill Moyers sits in on foreign policy conferences, in the role of the President's personal adviser, but he has no operational responsibility.

Schlesinger called Rostow an "economic historian turned social philosopher." Rostow was a professor of economic history at Massachusetts Institute of Technology when he first came to the White House as Bundy's deputy at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration.

A year before, he had published a collection of lectures on "The Stages of Economic Growth," subtitled "A Non-Communist Manifesto." In scholarly language, it presented an alternative to Karl Marx's theory of how societies evolve.

Rostow became the White House's expert on guerrilla warfare. "We are determined to help destroy this international disease; that is, guerrilla war designed, initiated, supplied and led from outside an independent nation," he told a graduating class at the U. S. Army's special warfare school at Fort Bragg, N. C., in June, 1961.

The View From the Seventh Floor

"It is important that the world become clear in mind, for example, that the operation run from Hanoi against Viet Nam is as clear a form of aggression as the violation of the 38th parallel by the North Korean armies in June, 1950."

After less than a year in the White House basement, Rostow moved over to the State Department as counselor and chairman of the policy planning staff. He produced all sorts of long-range policy papers but was out of the stream of day-to-day decision-making. He found time to write a book, "View From the Seventh Floor," evaluating American policy in the cold war. It concluded:

"If we in the West demonstrate a capacity to persist doggedly along the lines of current policy and commitment—lines which have been built up in four postwar administrations and by a generation's effort throughout the West—we have every reason to believe not only that we shall not be buried, but that the principles for which we stand shall triumph."

His return to the White House obviously has brought Rostow back into his element. Now 49, he talks of returning to the academic world someday. But his eyes beam through metal-rimmed glasses as he speaks of his job of coordinating the government's foreign policy along the lines picked by the President.

"It's a lively job," Rostow said. "But I've never felt more peaceful in a job, really."